DELICATE MOMENTS OF EXPOSURE IN ALICE MUNRO'S FICTION

"THE FASCINATING PAIN; THE HUMILIATING NECESSITY": DELICATE MOMENTS OF EXPOSURE IN ALICE MUNRO'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

The following study of Alice Munro's collections of short stories, Who Do You Think You Are?, The Moons of Jupiter, and The Progress of Love, closely examines the feminine perception of human relationships and traces Munro's theme of "the pain of human contact". Chapter I explores the changing perception of life and relationships as seen through the eyes of the central character of Who Do You Think You Are? and discusses the paradoxical view of life articulated by Munro, a view which asks that the abuse which characters inflict upon one another be seen as "both savage and splendid," as perversely necessary in any relationship between her characters. This idea of a necessary pain is discussed in Chapter II in light of Munro's more intense fascination with it in The Moons of Jupiter. Her vision of "the humiliating-necessity" of inflicting and enduring pain does not, however, culminate in a clearly-defined resolution to the paradoxes of experience; indeed, The Moons of Jupiter suggests Munro's growing hesitancy to solve the puzzles of human experience. Chapter II also examines Munro's experimentation with narrative time shifts and discusses

this new interest in technique as it pertains to her preoccupation with the disparity between illusion and reality in the lives of her characters.

The shifting back and forth between past and present is a technique which Munro continues to employ in her next work, The Progress of Love, which I examine in Chapter III. This most recent work, like Who Do You Think You Are? and The Moons of Jupiter, looks closely at the delicate moments of exposure in experience and at the necessary painfulness of those moments, but with a difference. In The Progress of Love Munro seems to allow her characters moments of serenity and moments of self-knowledge; the feminine perception of experience has altered to the degree that her characters appear able to move beyond disillusionment through to a kind of survival of those moments of exposure which in The Moons of Jupiter appear to overwhelm and almost paralyze the characters.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? 8

CHAPTER TWO: THE MOONS OF JUPITER 38

CHAPTER THREE: THE PROGRESS OF LOVE 64

CONCLUSION 82

BIBLIOGRAPHY 84

INTRODUCTION

To read Alice Munro's work is to become convinced that the title of The Moons of Jupiter (1982) conveys symbolically the significance inherent in all her stories. From the publication of her first collection of short stories, Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), to her most recent book, The Progress of Love (1986), Munro's depiction of human relationships does seem, as one of her critics has remarked, "analagous to a system of heavenly bodies moving in relation to one another" (Martin 34). Exemplifying a complicated interaction of forces, her characters influence one another's lives in unexpected and inexplicable ways. Just as the moons or satellites of the planet, Jupiter, reveal at one time only one surface to the restraining power at their centre, "Munro's fiction clearly reflects that it is what the surface conceals rather than what it reveals that is central to her vision" (Dahlie 219). Thus, the depiction of human relationships, a portrayal that emphasizes the gravitational pull of one life on another, shows that her "art rests . . . on a haunted awareness of the complexity of all human relationships" (Rasporich 5). Indeed, as Munro herself

describes the nature of the perspective articulated in her fiction: "It's just a feeling about the intensity of what is there" (Metcalf 56).

While Munro's thematic emphasis ("areas of reality and experience which are not resolvable" [Dahlie 226]) is not unique, and has been dealt with by other writers, her imaginative interpretation of relationships -- especially her portrayal of the feminine perspective of these relationships -- reminds us of an Alex Colville painting. Like Colville, "[s]he transforms a mundane, ordinary world into something that is unsettling and mysterious" (Dahlie 220), and creates the illusion that there is something ominous concealed just below the surface of the commonplace. As do several critics writing on the juxtaposition of illusion and reality in Munro's fiction, her ability to expose a character's true motivations during a crucial moment in the narrative, Beverley Rasporich nicely summarizes one of Munro's crucial concerns: "In her various and subtle renderings of female characters from childhood to old age, she probes the nature of their identities beneath their artificial, disguised or misinterpreted social faces" (5).

Although other critics have examined the essential duality in Munro's fiction, the sense that "absurdity and horror are never far below the deceptively calm

surface of everyday life" (Lamont-Stewart 114), Rae McCarthy Macdonald, in her essay "A Madman Loose in the World: The Vision of Alice Munro," takes a slightly different view in asserting that Lives of Girls and Women (1971) epitomizes a "social garrison" in which the characters are controlled by the intangible boundary between "the world" of town and "the other country" represented by the Flats Road (371). Ironically, Macdonald's "garrison theory" places so much emphasis on Munro's portrayal of the landscape of Huron County that she fails to acknowledge the depiction of character and Munro's evocation of human emotion. John Orange, on the other hand, in his essay "Alice Munro and A Maze of Time" seems to come closer to an understanding of her unique perspective and how that perspective unfolds when he stresses Munro's ability to convey the intricacies of human experience. Orange notes that with the manipulation of "narrative time as a structural device in the telling of her stories," Munro "explores the secret selves inside the roles and public masks we wear only to discover even deeper and often unfathomable depths to the human personality" (83). And as Patricia Bradbury adds: "so speedily can she crack open one of her characters that we shudder with the recognition that what we know about people is basically what we imagined" (42).

Like Patricia Bradbury, many other critics have

agreed that Munro strips and then exposes "like tissued layers, the deep strata in people's lives" (Bradbury 42), but, as yet, little has been written on her most recent works, with the exception of book reviews. For instance, although several years have elapsed since the publication of Munro's fourth book, Who Do You Think You Are? (1978), this collection of linked stories portraying one central character, Rose, from childhood to middle-age, is usually compared to the highly-acclaimed, Lives of Girls and Women (1971), which focusses on the significant moments in the life of Del Jordan and her struggle to become a writer. Helen Hoy, however, rightly sees Who Do You Think You Are? as a "darker work" than Lives of Girls and Women and says that the much studied themes of "the illusory and the real have become less confident and straightforward in this work" (113). Thus, in the opening episode of Who Do You Think You Are? when Rose is beaten by her father, her thoughts seem to anticipate the moments of confusion and despair inherent in the later works, The Moons of Jupiter and The Progress of Love. Rose wonders how the banal objects in the kitchen can witness this abuse; she wonders at how they apparently participate in this grotesque act. Articulating the paradoxical quality that becomes evident as we read Munro's work, Rose observes that "treachery is the other side of dailiness" (17).

Munro sets the stage for her sometimes ambiguous and almost always paradoxical perspective on human relationships and the feminine perception of these relationships as far back as the title story of Dance of the Happy Shades, where the narrator says of Miss Marsalle's piano recital, "things are getting out of hand, anything may happen" (212). Although Munro's fascination with "the other side of dailiness" is still apparent in her later works, she has also perfected the craft of short-story writing, especially with respect to the movement of narrative time. As E. D. Blodgett acutely observes about The Progress of Love:

> Her stories seem to begin sideways, or slant [sic] . . . and then proceed not through the linear turns of the plot . . . but rather by bending back and forth in time, continually un- doing the reader's expectations . . . . Munro's last collection, The Progress of Love, is marked by a deepening of this aspect of her art and by something more. This work is in many ways denser, more elusive. By its meditative manner of telling, it unwaveringly bids the reader to consider the implications the secrecy of [sic] its prose possesses: what characters mean, what we mean, and what mystery envelops us. (32)

By contrast, Heather Henderson's review of The Progress of Love, and specifically her interpretation of "Fits", illustrates that at least one critic has mistakenly accepted the "dailiness" or the surface appearance of

reality and has failed to examine the more disturbing aspect of the central character's response to a murder-suicide. Like Rae Macdonald's interpretation, Henderson's too, in not acknowledging that the murder-suicide only forms a back-drop for the real issue in this story, exposes the flaws in her critical assumptions about Munro's work. "Fits" is not about the "heroic refusal to violate the mystery of death" (Henderson 57); it is about Peg's perception of death and her disturbing lack of response to the horrendous scene that she has just witnessed.

It is this essential paradox that this thesis will address -- the "paradox [that] helps sustain Munro's thematic insistence of the doubleness of reality" (Hoy 101) -- and particularly, the duality in the feminine perception of human experience. Such a duality has been noted by one critic, Bharati Mukherjee, who correctly points out that the female characters in The Moons of Jupiter are "tormented by the gap between what life promised and what it has actually delivered" (47). Mukherjee illuminates the central issue in this thesis when she explains that Munro seems to be fascinated by the gap between reality and illusion, captivated by the painful reality of human experience. The women in The Moons of Jupiter

> . . . want to forget, so that
> memory will not torture them
> with unappeasable longings; but
> they cannot forget. In the mean-

> time, just in case life
> does deliver on its original
> promise, they remain vigilant:
> they read, they pluck their
> eyebrows, they try out daring
> shades of blushes, they buy
> red satin blouses. They
> claim they'll know to stop
> before they become garish
> and absurd. (Mukherjee 47)

This fascination with a painful reality leads Munro to construct characters and circumstances that play on the sometimes ambiguous relationship between the surface reality and the "unacknowledged realities, mysterious depths in the ordinary, the paradoxes at the core of human psychological responses" (Orange 87). Munro does not just construct characters who are fascinated with "daring shades of blushes," but she creates characters who seem perversely fascinated with the painful and humiliating changes they have undergone, captivated by "the other side of dailiness" (Who Do You Think You Are? 17). Epitomizing the paradoxical quality of life, Munro is intrigued by the painful reality inherent in the feminine perception of human relationships and she conveys "the fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity" that resides below the surface or in the ominous shadows of everyday life (The Moons of Jupiter 27).

I

Who Do You Think You Are?

Alice Munro examines a particular aspect of human relationships, a paradoxical view of reality that she, in The Moons of Jupiter, calls "the pain of human contact. . . . The fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity" (27). Although she explores the decisive and painful moments that occur in her characters' relationships with others, she does not provide a simple solution to this dilemma. Instead, Munro illustrates that human relationships seem to be necessarily painful; perpetual happiness is only an illusion. Similarly, she shows that "the pain of human contact" does not always create a sense of aversion to or even a desire to live in isolation. For example, the story "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field" in the collection entitled The Moons of Jupiter, depicts the difficulties experienced by a family of middle-aged spinsters who have existed apart from the modern world, women who have allowed the daily routine on a farm to form the basis of their lives.

While Munro vividly conveys the discomfort of these women and their inability to communicate with out-

siders, the adolescent narrator in this story reveals a positive aspect of the pain of human contact. Thus, although the narrator may be captivated by the aunts' "great effort of will [that] kept them from running away and hiding" (27), her other references about this decisive moment of recognition illustrate Munro's interest in the evocation of emotion that resides beneath "the deep strata in people's lives" (Bradbury 42). Experiencing a silent moment of awareness, the young narrator realizes that the pain of human contact is inevitable; she is "hypnotized by it" (27), mesmerized by the recognition of this necessary pain. For her, this moment epitomizes the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity.

In exploring these intense moments that symbolically convey a fascinating pain, Munro's theme takes a variety of forms. For instance, the pain of human contact may become a physical experience, as we discover in the adolescent struggles of Rose in Who Do You Think You Are?, where the violence of "Royal Beatings" signifies an event that is "both savage and splendid" (1). Similarly, Munro's theme takes the form of silent anguish when Rose, during a period of sexual awakening, allows the clergyman on the train to fondle her. Later, this pain typifies the agony of decision and loss when a more mature Rose experiences self-destructive tendencies during the collapse of her

marriage to Patrick.

In contrast to the young woman's desire to minimize the struggle inherent in human relationships, Alice Munro also illustrates that the pain of human contact may be actually sought by the middle-aged women who understands the mutability of sexual relationships but desperately needs the reassurance that she is still sexually desirable. An aging and lonely Rose is willing to risk all for an intimate relationship, even though she knows that a young woman will soon come along and symbolically lead Rose's present lover "through a doorway into a room or landscape where Rose couldn't follow" (Who 173). While Rose fails to escape the sense of loss, the final anguish is preferable to a life of solitude or loneliness.

Asserting that human relationships are at times inexorably painful, Munro examines these significant moments from a feminine perspeotive. She concentrates on the crucial or decisive events in the lives of her female characters. Thus, her stories may reveal different interpretations of a moment of awareness; she may depict adolescent contempt for and embarrassment about such moments or the sense of loss when a marriage ends in divorce, but whatever the age of her characters, the instance that reveals the pain of human contact forms the basis of the stories.

While Munro focusses on the significant moments in the lives of her characters, these instances are frequently subtle or ambiguous, especially when a character experiences a silent moment of awareness. In addition, her narrative often moves back and forth, exploring certain periods of time, creating gaps in meaning, and forcing the reader to combine disparate parts of the narrative before the climactic or decisive moment is comprehended. Using shifts in the structure of the narrative, Munro searches for the particular moments of significance. For instance, she attempts to define this moment of awareness in the story "The Office" in Dance of the Happy Shades. "However I put it," remarks the narrator, "the words create their space of silence, the delicate moment of exposure" (59), and it is this crucial moment that she reveals to her readers. While Munro's stories revolve around these frequently painful, but "delicate moment[s] of exposure," there are times when both the characters and the reader remain immersed in a silent and profound instance of recognition.

Alice Munro's Who Do You Think You Are? may exemplify the pain of human contact, but in the opening story, "Royal Beatings," which portrays the violence of family relationships, the moments of exposure seem anything but delicate or subtle. In this story we witness an adolescent's awareness of the inadequacies of the adult world and we

experience Rose's struggle to assert her own identity. A perpetual struggle with her father, and a barely-repressed contempt for her stepmother, Flo, represent a painful ritual, a "wrangle . . . [that] has already commenced, has been going on forever, like a dream that goes back and back into other dreams, over hills and through doorways, maddeningly dim and populous and familiar and elusive" (11).

Seeing herself trapped by the squalid reality of the small town of Hanratty, Rose surrounds herself with an aura of silent contempt, a false sense of superiority that protects her from a growing understanding of her parents' sexual relationship and the knowledge that her parents are also trapped in a life not of their own choosing. Observing the relationship between her father and Flo, Rose "pushed any discovery aside with embarrassment and dread" (3), but her attempt to insulate herself from them does not prevent her from entering a perpetual struggle, an initially silent dispute that can only lead to a physically violent conclusion. Rose understands that words mean nothing in this situation; the pain the family shares and the ritual of abuse that they all enact have little to do with verbal communication. "What do they have to say to each other?," she wonders, concluding that, "It doesn't really matter" (13); the reality of the relationship ensures that "[t]hey continue, can't help

continuing, can't leave each other alone. When they seem to have given up they were really just waiting and building up steam" (13).

The eagerness of their desire to inflict pain, "the struggle itself . . . that can't be stopped, can never be stopped, short of where it has got to, now" (15), inevitably builds to the critical moment when they must all reveal their personal inadequacies, when they will shamefully reveal too much about themselves during the "Royal Beating" (1). Indeed, the entire scene with Flo appears like a well-rehearsed act, from the time of Flo's anger over Rose's ingratitude and conceit, to the moment when the doors are ritually closed, and Flo makes a dramatic exit to seek the aid of Rose's father. From this point the tension quickly builds to the moment of explosive violence, a moment that illustrates a mututal "difficulty in believing that what you know must happen really will happen, that there comes a time when you can't draw back" (16).

At the crucial moment when they all understand "that there comes a time when you can't draw back," their perception of one another's private motivations and vulnerability is silently but completely communicated. For instance, Flo, the one who has instigated the "Royal Beating", always finds it impossible to accept the un-

avoidable conclusion to this family conflict. Thus, as her husband's face "fills with hatred and pleasure" (16) and his belt "is being grasped at the necessary point" (16), Flo desperately tries to prevent the inevitable scene of violence. Similarly, Rose realizes that her father "is acting, and he means it" (16); he plays his part seriously: "Rose knows that, she knows everything about him" (16).

Once her father's act begins, Rose's silent contempt and superior stance are replaced by a disconcerting display of weakness. Her physical pain creates its own humiliating form of exposure for "[a]t the first, or maybe the second, crack of pain, she draws back. She will not accept it. She runs around the room, she tries to get to the doors" (17). Indeed, as Rose admits, "[t]hey will give this anything that is necessary, it seems, they will go to any lengths" to make contact and to expose each other's weakness (17). And this moment that has created a perverse form of connection or human contact exemplifies "the fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity," a moment that is paradoxically "both savage and splendid" (1):

> Not an ounce of courage or of
> stoicism in her, it would seem.
> She runs, she screams, she im-
> plores. Her father is after her,
> cracking the belt at her when he
> can, then abandoning it and using
> his hands. Bang over the ear,
> then bang over the other ear.
> Back and forth, her head ringing.

> Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in her face again. He shakes her and hits her against the wall, he kicks her legs. She is incoherent, insane, shrieking. Forgive me! Oh please, please forgive me!
> (17)

This frenzied moment of physical punishment has a cleansing or cathartic effect on the family relationship. During the moment of exposure, an instant when they are embarrassed by their own absurdity, the violence creates an aura of calm, and allows the ritual of the family dynamic to begin again. For example, Rose is relegated to her room, where she decides "[s]he will never speak to them, she will never look at them with anything but loathing, she will never forgive them" (18). But as soon as the peace offerings appear, the cold cream and the treats prepared by Flo, Rose comprehends this silent form of communication. While nothing is actually said, Rose knows that they have all survived their humiliating moment of exposure. "Rose will understand that life has started up again, . . . They will be embarrassed", but the "Royal Beating" produces tranquillity and a momentary absence of struggle: "They will feel a queer lassitude, a convalescent indolence, not far off satisfaction" (20).

In contrast to the cleansing effect of the physical

abuse, the unexpected glimpses into one another's most intimate thoughts typify an unbearable form of the pain of human contact. These delicate moments of exposure produce a mental anguish that must be avoided; one must be protected from these instances of distress. When Rose listens at the carpentry shed and hears her father reciting "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces" (4), Rose's sudden awareness of her father's secret desires creates an intolerable sense of discomfort and confusion that she must escape. She is distressed that "[t]he person who spoke these words and the person who spoke to her as her father were not the same, though they seemed to occupy the same space" (4). Thus, Rose must flee from the knowledge that her father also feels trapped by the squalid reality of poverty; she must protect herself from the revelation that she really does not know everything about this individual. This moment of awareness "was like a hand clapped against Rose's chest . . . . She had to run then, she had to get away. She knew that was enough to hear, and besides, what if he caught her? It would be terrible" (4).

If Rose feels "there was not a thing in their lives they were protected from" (49), this painful awareness of one another becomes even more acute when Rose comprehends her own sexuality. Secretly abhorred by the idea of

physical change, Rose silently struggles with the reality of an awakening sexuality and a desire to repress any knowledge of physical change. Conscious of the pervading sense of uneasiness that exists between her and her father, Rose knows that their mutual feeling of embarrassment is silently communicated; she feels exposed and unappealing in his presence. Her maturing body seems to pose a threat to their relationship:

> The sight of her slopping around with her hands in the dishpan, her thoughts a thousand miles away, her rump already bigger than Flo's, her hair wild and bushy; the sight of the large and indolent and self-absorbed fact of her, seemed to fill him with irritation, with melancholy, almost with disgust. (47)

Rose comprehends her father's attempt to deny her sexuality because she is also experiencing confusing and frequently disparate views of her own body. Vacillating between wanting to look like a woman and a feeling of disgust over the thoughts of "[s]pongy tissues, inflamed membranes, tormented nerve-ends, shameful smells; humiliation" (63), Rose's inner turmoil makes her father's presence a perplexing experience. Until her father "passed through the room she was holding herself still, she was looking at herself through his eyes. She too could hate the space she occupied" (47).

In the story "Wild Swans," we discover the consequences

of Rose's conflicting emotions; that is, the confusion and embarrassment she feels because of the denial of her sexuality and the reality of her sexual awakening. Thus, during her first trip alone, Rose is caught between two opposing views of sexuality; she recalls Flo's warning about "White Slavers" and people disguised as ministers who were known to sexually assault young women while she also vividly imagines "lumps of flesh, pink snouts, fat tongues, blunt fingers, all on their way trotting and creeping and lolling and rubbing, looking for comfort" (63). Feeling trapped by a pervading sense of guilt when she considers sexual promiscuity and the inability to say no to the minister who places a hand on her knee, Rose experiences the anguish of indecision. Almost paralyzed by guilt and the painful recognition of her own sexual urges, she wonders if the pressure that she senses is really a hand. Horrified by the thought that this may really be the minister's hand that is resting on her knee, Rose is also consumed by a desire to know more:

> Then she said to herself, what if it is a hand? That was the kind of thing she could imagine. She would sometimes look at men's hands, at the fuzz on their forearms, their concentrating profiles. She would think about everything they could do. (61)

Although the presence of the minister's hand makes Rose "feel uncomfortable, resentful, slightly

disgusted, trapped and wary" she seems to have no control over her own body (63). Indeed, when the wandering hand is able symbolically "to get the ferns to rustle and the streams to flow, to waken a sly luxuriance" (63), Rose may decide that "she would rather not" but her body has no such inhibitions (63). Unable to articulate her objections, Rose's body responds eagerly with a will of its own; she is exposed before us in her first sexual experience. Even as Rose succumbs to the stranger's hand and suffers from the certainty that "[t]his was disgrace, this was beggary" (64), the sensation the hand creates suggests that she has been given the chance to imagine "the wild swans" (61). And as Rose "rides the cold wave of greed, of greedy assent" (64), the mundane scenery outside the train window, "Glassco's Jams and Marmalades . . . the big pulsating pipes of oil refineries" (64), creates a vivid contrast to the dramatic experience taking place on the other side of the window. Rose describes the experience that makes her feel, paradoxically, both like a "[v]ictim and [an] accomplice":

> The gates and the towers of the Exhibition Grounds came to view, the painted domes and pillars floated marvelously against her eyelids' rosy sky. Then flew apart in celebration. You could have had such a flock of birds, wild swans, even, wakened under one big dome together, exploding

from it, taking to the sky. (64)

Munro's portrayal of adolescent sexuality illustrates that this moment of sexual awareness exemplifies a fascinating pain, a manifestation that convinces Rose at the end of "Wild Swans" "[t]o dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in [her] own, but newly named, skin" (66). But this sense of adventure or bright moment of awareness becomes a different type of exposure when Rose (now a young woman at university) relinquishes her desire for independence and plays the role of "the Beggar Maid" (79).

In the story "The Beggar Maid" Munro presents a young woman's perception of the pain of human contact, and she conveys the mental torment that Rose experiences when she becomes involved in a relationship with a man who equates her with the image of "the Beggar Maid, . . . The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude" (79). Revealing Rose's silent awareness that her relationship with Patrick is a mistake, Munro depicts the significant moments of exposure that lead to Rose's disastrous marriage to Patrick. Concealing the ambiguity of her feelings, Rose poses as a "damsel in distress"; Patrick's imagined "world of knights and ladies; outrages; devotions" seems like a much better world than Rose ever experienced in Hanratty (76).

Munro shows that while Rose has physically escaped the poverty of Hanratty when she enters university, the stigma attached to her being designated as an underprivileged or scholarship student ensures that, mentally, she cannot leave the sordid reality of Hanratty behind her. For instance, Rose suffers from the knowledge that on the basis of physical appearance the scholarship students seem set apart from the other, more privileged students. Similarly, living with Dr. Henshawe, as many scholarship girls have done before her, Rose comprehends the true meaning of poverty. Feeling humiliated by the striking difference between Dr. Henshawe's gracious home and the vulgarity of her own home in Hanratty, Rose realizes that her new life with Dr. Henshawe has "destroyed the naturalness, the taken-for-granted background, of home. To go back there was to go quite literally into a crude light" (69).

Poverty was not the simple state of being under-privileged, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think, and it definitely did not resemble Patrick's romantic notions of "worn good taste" (90). Suffering in silence, Rose believes that the poverty of Hanratty is much more shameful; it is a degrading condition that she would like to escape:

> Poverty was not just wretchedness, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think, it was not just deprivation. It meant having those ugly tube lights and being proud of them. It meant

> continual talk of money and malicious talk about new things people had bought and whether they were paid for. It meant pride and jealousy flaring over something like the new pair of plastic curtains, imitating lace that Flo had bought for the front window. (69)

The vulgarity of Rose's background is also reflected in her perception of her physical appearance. Humiliated by her shapeless Hanratty clothes, suits which guaranteed "that there should be no revelation of the figure" (73), Rose feels an immediate sense of aversion when she looks at the other scholarship students, whose physical unattractiveness only heightens her feeling of shame. As Rose gazes at them through the office door, she experiences the painful knowledge that she is one of them. Horrified by the pathetic appearance of the other scholarship students, she cannot bring herself to associate with them, especially when she notices that they also wear poverty like a brand:

> It was not possible, of course, that they all looked like this. It was not possible that in one glance through the window of the door Rose could detect traces of eczema, stained underarms, dandruff, moldy deposits on the teeth and crusty flakes in the corners of the eyes. (73)

Aware that she is set apart from the more affluent students, she also notices that "[t]here was something

edgy, jumpy, disconcerting, about [Patrick]" (67); but her initial feeling of uneasiness about their relationship is overshadowed by a sense of gratitude. Patrick, one of the affluent students, finds Rose appealing; he represents a means of escape from the poverty of Hanratty. Thus, to demonstrate her gratitude and disbelief that someone from a privileged background could find her so desirable, Rose assumes the role of "the Beggar Maid," mistakenly attempting to become what she believes Patrick sees in her. Trying to appear all "helplessness and gratitude" (79), she reliquishes the inclination to assert her own identity and struggles to conceal her actual apprehension about the relationship.

While Rose suffers from the knowledge that she does not love Patrick, the painful moments of exposure illustrate how destructive a relationship founded on pretense will become for both of them. She becomes disturbed by Patrick's eagerness to reveal his own sense of inadequacy, because, ironically, Patrick exposes flaws in his character that she can already perceive for herself. Indeed, Patrick's confession, "I suppose I don't seem very manly" infuriates Rose; his truthfulness poses a threat to their relationship and creates a moment of anguish for Rose that only the truth can produce (80). Breaking through a silence that protects them from understanding one another, Patrick

dares to reveal too much and Rose is repelled by the disconcerting truth of his words. "She was startled and irritated by such exposure" (77), and she wonders why "[h]e took such chances; had nothing ever taught him not to take such chances?" (77).

Like the distress Rose experiences when Patrick so eagerly divulges his sense of inadequacy, his need for reassurance also ensures that Rose must constantly struggle to maintain the silence, to conceal the disgust that she really feels. Ironically, this struggle to conceal her bitterness over Patrick's lack of pride becomes almost intolerable, and Rose's true feelings are revealed through absurd action instead of words. For example, as they walk through the park together she realizes that Patrick "loved some obedient image that she herself could not see" (84). Seeking love and constant gratification from this "obedient image," Patrick asks, "'Do you love me? Do you really love me?'" (80). While Patrick assumes that Rose can supply the inner strength that he lacks, Rose's actions illustrate the disenchantment that she actually feels, the paradoxical quality of this relationship that illustrates, "[i]t was a miracle; it was a mistake" (80):

> She was sick of herself as much
> as him, she was sick of the
> picture they made at this moment,
> walking across a snowy downtown

> park, her bare hand snuggled in Patrick's, in his pocket. Some outrageous and cruel things were being shouted, inside her. She had to do something, to keep them from getting out. She started tickling and teasing him. (80)

Similarly, in an effort to conceal the aversion that Rose often experiences when Patrick touches her, she is overwhelmed by the desire to scandalize him with her unpredictability and sexual boldness. Repelled by the fact that "she could not find any force in him" (80), Rose shows that she can never really love or even respect Patrick. When he refers to Rose as "The White Goddess" she must escape this ridiculous image (80). In fact, her absurdity disguises a disturbing reality; she would like to escape a relationship that is founded on pretense and deceit:

> She wriggled away from him. She bent down and got a handful of snow from the drift by the steps and clapped it on his head.
>
> 'My White God.'
>
> He shook the snow out. She scooped up some more and threw it at him. He didn't laugh, he was surprised and ashamed. She brushed the snow off his eyebrows and licked it off his ears. She was laughing, though she felt desperate rather than merry. She didn't know what made her do this. (81)

A pervading sense of anguish, the painful reality that resides beneath the superficiality of appearance, is strikingly conveyed when Rose goes to Vancouver Island

to meet Patrick's family. Although Rose is awed by the magnificence of the family estate, she is even more fascinated by the hostility and the atmosphere of silent contempt that exists in the family, and after spending a few days with Patrick's family she decides that unhappiness and bitterness seems to permeate the air. Indeed, "[s]he had never imagined so much true malevolence collected in one place" (88); she had not realized "how some places could choke you off, choke off your very life" (85).

In this repressive atmosphere, Patrick's family acts as if they are functioning under a state of siege; the desire to inflict pain typifies their constant struggle for supremacy. Insulated from one another by a feeling of superiority and contempt, Patrick's family only interacts when the opportunity to torment or embarrass one another arises. Ironically, they all seem compelled to fulfill some perverse version of "the fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity;" and Patrick's agonized confession to Rose, "'You see why I need you? I need you so much!'" assumes an ominous quality when she considers the scorn that Patrick has suffered as a member of this family (88). Rose knows that it will always be impossible to reassure Patrick, to provide the strength of character that his family has destroyed.

Although he is humiliated by his family's intentional

cruelty, Patrick is unaware that he exhibits the same attitudes of scorn and contempt. For example, Rose experiences "horror and embarrassment" when Patrick exposes his feelings of degradation and worthlessness in front of her (87). When Patrick "began to shout at the table in general an account of her scholarships and prizes" (87), Rose comprehends his sense of inadequacy, but she wonders, "What did he hope for? Was he so witless as to think such bragging would subdue them, would bring out anything but further scorn" (87)?

In contrast to the opulent surroundings that Rose witnesses at Patrick's family estate, the trip to Hanratty is a symbolic journey or return to vulgarity; but, ironically, the experience in Hanratty proves to be as painful as the visit to Vancouver. The disparity between Patrick's wealth and Rose's poverty ensures that the trip to Rose's family home is also a disaster. No longer seen through the narrow experience and vision of the adolescent Rose, the symbols of poverty, the startling tawdriness of her stepmother's house, are, to the more mature and worldly woman that Rose has become, completely humiliating. Indeed, Flo's new "plastic swan, lime green in color, with slits in the wings, in which were stuck folded, colored paper napkins" is a token symbol of everything about her roots that Rose is ashamed and everything for which

Patrick bears an attitude of silent contempt (88).

While Munro forces us almost to visualize the centre piece on the table, Flo's new plastic swan, the unimaginative food and the ketchup bottle sitting on the plastic tablecloth, we are also aware of the tension that permeates the room. The pain of human contact, an almost tangible reality, illustrates that these people will never be able to communicate. Finding that there was "no way that she could talk, and sound natural" (89), Rose describes her feeling of humiliation as she observes the crude reality that surrounds her:

> She was ashamed of the food and the swan and the plastic tablecloth; ashamed for Patrick, the gloomy snob, who made a startled grimace when Flo passed him the toothpick-holder; ashamed for Flo with her timidity and hypocrisy and pretensions; most of all ashamed for herself. (89)

Compelled to view the surroundings through Patrick's eyes, Rose must feel that Flo's interpretation of local history heightens her own sense of shame until the torment truly represents the fascinating pain and the humiliating necessity of it. Talking in a highly agitated manner and frantically trying to ignore Patrick's scornful silence, Rose thinks that she cannot feel more embarrassed than she is at the moment, but when Flo attempts to interest Patrick in local history Rose realizes that she was wrong

about her ability to experience even more shame. Flo's humorous interpretation of the crucial events in the history of Hanratty makes Rose feel exposed, laid bare by the coarseness of her background, especially when Flo announces that the concession she lived on "was the worst place ever created for suiciding." One man "cut his own throat from ear to ear," while another man almost got his head "tore off" when he "hanged himself using a chain, the kind of chain you hook on a tractor with" (89).

Unable to conceal the reality of her background, Rose also suffers from the knowledge that Patrick makes no effort to disguise his scornful attitude. Ironically, Patrick's blatant insensitivity is a mirror-image of his father's, and his cruel comments to Rose remind us of his father's sneering remarks. Oblivious to the embarrassment that Rose has just endured and only concerned with his impressions of Hanratty, Patrick is once again unaware that certain truths should never be revealed. "'You were right', said Patrick, as they left Hanratty on the bus. It is a dump. You must be glad to get away'" (90). In addition, Patrick illustrates that he is even more ashamed of Rose's background than she is. Desperately trying to imagine a more genteel or romantic version of poverty, Patrick asserts, "'Of course that's not your real mother. . . . Your real parents can't have been

like that'" (90).

In contrast to her silent reception of Patrick's cruel remarks, Rose finally rejects the role of "the Beggar Maid" and articulates her true feelings for him. Feeling trapped in a situation beyond her control as she was in "Royal Beatings," Rose confesses that she does not want to marry Patrick, thus releasing herself from all the pain and pretense that she has endured during the relationship. When Rose goes to his apartment and finally admits, "'I never loved you . . . You're a sissy . . . You're a prude'" (94), she has the sudden urge "to beat and beat him, to say worse and worse, uglier and crueller things" (95). Having remained silent for so long the truth is finally revealed during this moment of exposure.

While this painful outburst sets her free, Rose seems incapable of directing her own life and in fact, "She didn't like giving up being envied; the experience was so new to her" (95). Her decision to resume the relationship foreshadows the constant struggle and mutual unhappiness that will typify their married life. Her decision ensures that their relationship will come closer to destroying both of them, and as Rose acknowledges years later: "They could not separate until enough damage had been done, to keep them apart" (97).

The choice Rose makes as she looks at Patrick sitting in his study carrel, the sudden resolution to ask for Patrick's forgiveness and to experience a romantic reunion, confuses the reader as much as it eventually bewilders Rose when she reviews her motivations. In fact, the meaning of this critical moment remains ambiguous and lends itself to several interpretations; the sudden shift in the narrative from the point where Rose admits "It was not resistable, after all. She did it" (96), to a time much later when Rose analyzes her private motivations, illustrates that such intense moments may not lend themselves to a simple interpretation. Thus, Rose must supply her own reasons for the decision, arguing that "if she had had the price of a train ticket to Toronto" she would have remained free, or if Patrick had not offered such financial security she would not have felt compelled to marry him (97). But, ironically, her attempt to vindicate herself appears unacceptable when she is fully aware that the marriage will lead to mutual unhappiness and then to divorce. As she later admits about the divorce, which "had happened as painfully and ruinously as possible" (137): "Even on her wedding day she had known this time would come, and that if it didn't she might as well be dead. The betrayal was hers" (136).

Unlike Patrick, Rose anticipates that discontent

will permeate their marital relationship; even as she proclaims to Patrick, "'I love you, I do love you, it's all right, I was terrible, I didn't mean it'" (96), her words foreshadow a situation that reminds the reader of the explosive violence of "Royal Beatings," a relationship that exemplifies "the humiliating necessity" of suffering:

> She hopes she did not tell people
> (but thinks she did) that she used
> to beat her head against the bedpost,
> that she smashed a gravy boat through
> a dining-room window; that she was so
> frightened, so sickened by what she
> had done that she lay in bed,
> shivering, and begged and begged for
> his forgiveness. Which he granted.
> Sometimes she flew at him; sometimes
> he beat her. (97)

The perpetual conflict inherent in a marriage that ended as painfully as possible becomes a different type of struggle for the middle-aged and divorced Rose. While freedom from Patrick does not preclude the pain of human contact, Rose discovers that the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity has definitely become more complex. A middle-aged Rose perceives human relationships in a more cynical way; she is conscious of the mutability of sexual relationships, anticipating a sense of loss before the encounter has even reached its conclusion. But, while Rose appears fatalistic or pessimistic in her approach to intimate relationships, she still experiences hope; a glimpse of happiness, no matter how brief, is

preferable to a solitary existence.

Unlike Rose's relationship with Patrick, where she had the power to reject his marriage proposal and then to reinstate herself in his affections, a more mature Rose realizes that relationships are short-lived and most difficult to establish. For instance, in "Simon's Luck," we discover a disillusioned Rose, a woman who acknowledges her need for human contact. As a single, career woman who "gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations" (156), Rose "had driven down to Kingston just for the party, a fact which slightly shamed her" (157). And, once at the party Rose is conscious of her own sense of desperation, a feeling that her age sets her apart from the young people who are gathered there. She worries about being "doomed to hang around on the fringes of things, making judgments" (158), and her fear of exclusion is based on age, not appearance, as it was when she was a scholarship student. Rose is aware of the disparity between her age and that of the young hostess; but, as she also observes, the host, a man of about Rose's own age, "had shed a wife, a family, a house, a discouraging future, set himself up with new clothes and new furniture and a succession of student mistresses" (160).

Although Rose realizes that "[m]en can do it" (160), that men could begin new lives with younger women and

seemed to prefer them, she also knows that the domestic tranquillity that surrounds her does not ensure a permanent relationship between this young woman and an older man. Even for the young hostess the sexual relationship will end as quickly, but much more painfully, than it began; indeed, "Rose wondered at the pains taken here. The bread, the pâté, the hanging plants, the kittens, all on behalf of a most precarious and temporary domesticity" (162).

Like that of the hostess, Rose's brief moment of happiness with Simon (a man she meets at the party) is also "precarious and temporary." In the "widespread sunlight of the moment" she believes that Simon is "the man for [her] life!" (168), and when he fails to appear the next weekend she must struggle with an anguished sense of loss and rejection. Surrounded by the preparations she has made for Simon's arrival, Rose sits alone in the dark kitchen and comes to the conclusion that "People's lives were surely more desperate than they used to be." Ironically, however, it is Rose who has become more desperate, and when she finally accepts that Simon is not coming, she is bewildered by her sense of desperation and by a pervading sense of futility (170). Hoping to continue a relationship that was only a brief encounter, "[s]he had turned Simon into the peg on which her hopes were hung . . ." (170).

Feeling foolish and depressed as she lingers in the dark kitchen, Rose comments on her feeling of loss, a sense of loss that comes from the belief that this particular relationship will be different. As a middle-aged woman, Rose has experienced the transitory quality of relationships and she knows that this weekend of waiting "would [become] only a casual trial run, a haphazard introduction to the serious, commonplace, miserable ritual" (171), an observance that begins with anticipation and ends in dejection.

Struggling to cope with the pain of loss, Rose cynically reviews the familiar pattern of her relationships and is forced to contemplate the well-known course of events that epitomize the humiliating necessity or the pain experienced at the conclusion of each brief encounter. Able to recognize the familiar pattern, Rose's sudden assertion, "Better lose him now" (172), conveys the pathos of her situation; ironically, she knows that she has already lost Simon, but she tries to insulate herself from this distressing reality, and decides:

> The mistake was in buying the wine, . . . and the sheets and the cheese and the cherries. Preparations court disaster . . . . Hour after hour in the dark and rain she foresaw what could happen. She could wait through the weekend, fortifying herself with excuses and sickening with doubt, never leaving the house

> in case the phone might ring.
> Back at work on Monday, dazed but
> slightly comforted by the real
> world, she would get up the courage
> to write him a note . . . . (171)

Feeling caught between a pessimistic view of human relationships and the hope that she will find happiness, Rose knows that the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity becomes a reality for the middle-aged woman. Disillusioned, but still able to anticipate a glimpse of happiness, she accepts the mutability of human relationships and decides: "There seemed to be feelings which could only be spoken of in translation; perhaps they could only be acted on in translation; not speaking of them and not acting on them is the right course to take because translation is dubious. Dangerous as well" (210). Suspicious of the accuracy, pertinence, and fairness of her words and actions as conveyors of real feeling, Rose realizes not only that words furnish and fortify her with excuses and that "preparations court disaster," but that the urge she once felt to translate her feelings, "to beat and beat [Patrick], to say worse and worse, uglier and crueller things" (95), is an urge that often breeds "mortal damage." Such damage, such danger, continues, however, to be a source of fascination for her and for many other of Munro's

characters. What keeps the aunts in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: A Stone in the Field" from "running away and hiding" is, we are told, a "great effort of will" (Moons 27). For most of Munro's characters, however, it is hope, a faith in the illusion that human contact need not involve pain, exposure, humiliation. This, coupled with a paradoxical addiction to a painful hopelessness, a fascination with the unpleasant intensity of human contact, will keep Rose waiting in the darkness and silence of her kitchen and will keep many of the characters in Munro's later fictions from "running away and hiding."

II

The Moons of Jupiter

While the stories in Who Do You Think You Are? illustrate the significant moments in the life of one woman, these "moments of exposure" are more subtly expressed in The Moons of Jupiter. In the earlier work, Who Do You Think You Are?, Alice Munro conveys the changing perception of the pain of human contact, but in her collection of short stories, The Moons of Jupiter, she provides us with a more discerning interpretation of the feminine perception of human relationships. Indeed, The Moons of Jupiter exemplifies a progression in Munro's art; the stories illustrate that her writing has moved into a different phase of expression.

Structurally, these stories are more complex than the linked stories in Who Do You Think You Are?; they force the reader to consider how a particular moment functions in time, how the merging of past and present in narrative time establishes our perception of character. Similarly, as the narrative shifts from the present to the past the reader must search for the moment of significance and when the delicate moment of exposure is located it is

frequently open to more than one interpretation. For example, in Who Do You Think You Are? when Rose considers the reasons for her impulsive reconciliation with Patrick she is actually contemplating an event from the past. While she tries to recall a decisive moment that has become obscure with the passage of time, the narrator in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field" in The Moons of Jupiter comes to a different conclusion about our ability to accurately interpret an event from the past.

When the narrator in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field" tries to comprehend the relationship between her mother's cousins and Mr. Black she realizes that she may only be confusing illusion and reality. Questioning if anyone can accurately interpret a decisive moment from the past, the narrator decides that human motivations become ambiguous over time. Unlike Rose, she does not feel compelled to provide a simple answer for the complexities of human actions and her response seems to symbolize Munro's subtle treatment of the intimate relationships in The Moons of Jupiter. Experiencing her own silent moment of awareness, the narrator appears to epitomize Munro's treatment of the pain of human contact when she says: "Now I no longer believe that people's secrets are defined and communicable

or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize" (Moons 35).

Like the narrator's final determination in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field," Munro's other stories in The Moons of Jupiter emphasize the complexity inherent in human relationships. Conveying the elusive, the delicate moment of exposure, through a touch, a word or a moment of silence, Munro forces the reader to combine disparate parts of a story in order to assess the significance of a particular moment. Thus, the poignant moment at the conclusion of "Prue" when Prue places Gordon's cufflink in the tobacco tin -- a seemingly bizarre act -- is presented to the reader with little explanation. Silently placing the cufflink in the tobacco tin with the other small possessions, Prue demonstrates a painful reality, a delicate moment of exposure that is not clearly understood until we consider the other events in the story.

The final moment in "Prue" acquires a special significance after we comprehend that the articles in the tobacco tin symbolize a sense of suffering and rejection that Prue can never admit because her pain is concealed under a guise of being able to laugh at life's disasters; "She presents her life in anecdotes, ... doesn't take herself too seriously . . . is so unintense, and civilized,

and never makes any real demands or complaints" (Moons 129). In addition, she seems to accept that Gordon is in love with another woman, that he will marry Prue "in a few years' time, when he gets over being in love" (Moons 133). But Prue's silent acts represent a moment of exposure; the moment embodies the reality of her suffering and her sense of hopelessness:

> She never looks at them, and often forgets what she has there. They are not booty, they don't have ritualistic significance. She does not take something every time she goes to Gordon's house, . . . She doesn't do it in a daze and she doesn't seem to be under a compulsion. She just takes something, every now and then, and puts it away in the dark of the old tobacco tin, and more or less forgets about it. (Moons 133)

While the conclusion of "Prue" epitomizes a painful reality, the silent despair of a middle-aged woman who realizes that Gordon will always pursue younger women, Alice Munro also examines the pain of human contact from the point of view of the adolescent and the young woman. For instance, the adolescent narrator in "The Turkey Season" responds to the adult world in a different way from that of the adolescent Rose in Who Do You Think You Are?, who attempts to escape the painful awareness of her father's fantasies, a mutual recognition that they are trapped in a life beyond their control. Unlike Rose, the adolescent in "The Turkey Season" is fascinated by

the inconsistencies of adult behavior and she is bewildered by their adherence to stereotypical roles, the facade that conceals another reality beneath the surface of appearance. The young narrator may feel repelled by the thought of Marjorie and Lily (two of the workers at the Turkey Barn) "having sex" when they are so physically unattractive; "they had bad teeth, their stomachs sagged, [and] their faces were dull and spotty" (Moons 138). But this adolescent wants to comprehend the absurdities inherent in adult life, especially the private motivations of Herb Abbott, the foreman of the Turkey Barn.

As she seeks to comprehend the inconsistencies and stereotypical gender roles of the adult world, the narrator realizes that Herb Abbott's decision to exist outside the generally-accepted definition of manhood has made him an object of curiosity to the other workers in the Turkey Barn. "The details of his daily life, the small preferences, were of interest" (Moons 64) to her because Herb's exclusion from the customary male role has forced him into a silent world, one in which Herb freely admits that he preferred coffee instead of tea, but the question, "Where had he been brought up?" elicits the ambiguous response, "Here and there and all over" (Moons 64).

Realizing that Herb represents a mystery to the other workers, an enigma, the narrator begins to understand that Herb must feel like an object in a curiosity shop; he must experience an unexpressed sense of discomfort. While the other workers wondered, "How can a man want so little? No wife, no family, no house" (Moons 64), the narrator comes to her own moment of awareness, the knowledge that human beings cannot be explained or contained by such simplistic definitions. She may momentarily suffer from the same need to categorize Herb, to see him as one of the town's homosexuals who vividly portray recognizable gender roles by "their talents for decorating, for crocheting" (Moons 65), but like the narrator in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field" this teenager realizes that it is impossible to arrive at a definitive explanation of Herb.

In experiencing her own delicate moment of exposure she intuitively understands Herb's sense of privacy, the reality that Herb feels the need to protect himself from all inquiry. Appreciating that he conceals a profound sense of despair, the narrator illustrates a sensitivity toward the ambiguous nature of another individual's private motivations and emotions. She finally admits:

> I don't want to go into the question of whether Herb was homosexual or not, because the

> definition is of no use to me. I think that probably he was, but maybe he was not. (Even considering what happened later, I think that.) He is not a puzzle so arbitrarily solved. (Moons 65)

Arriving at the decision that Herb was "not a puzzle so arbitrarily solved" does not prevent the narrator from observing the pain of human contact or from noticing Herb's "peculiar, stricken look" (Moons 74) when his friend Brian is chased from the Turkey Barn. Although she does not understand the relationship between Brian and Herb, she is astute enough to comprehend that Herb suffers silently over this episode with Brian; surprisingly, Herb suffers from the loss of Brian, an unsavory and lewd character whose "insistent sexuality was that monotonous and meaningless" (Moons 69). And, while the narrator does not grasp the reason for Herb's look of anguish, this silent moment of awareness conveys a painful reality, or as she explains: "Isn't it true that people like Herb -- dignified, secretive, honorable people -- will often choose somebody like Brian, will waste their helpless love on some vicious silly person . . . (Moons 74).

When the narrative shifts to the present, a more mature woman can still vividly recall Herb's moment of

exposure and his look of anguish, but she also perceives that the motivations behind this painful moment have become more ambiguous with time. Time has obscured the significance of the event and a more mature narrator knows that Herb's "peculiar, stricken look" has become more difficult to define. Similarly, when she looks at the image of herself in the picture taken at the Turkey Barn on Christmas Eve so long ago, the narrator admits: "I am stout and cheerful and comradely in the picture, transformed into someone I don't even remember being or pretending to be" (Moons 72). And if the narrator does not remember this fourteen-year-old version of herself, she knows that separating the illusion and reality of Herb's painful moment has become an impossible proposition. But, while Herb's moment of exposure represents the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity that will never be fully comprehended, the experience of a more mature narrator allows her to understand one painful aspect of human relationships. Thinking of Herb's attraction to Brian, she confesses: "How attractive, how delectable, the prospect of intimacy is, with the very person who will never grant it. I can still feel the pull of a man like that, of his promising and refusing" (Moons 74).

Unlike the adolescent narrator in "The Turkey

Season" who wants to understand the contradictions inherent in the adult world and is curious about Herb's relationship with Brian, the young woman in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: Connection" has moved beyond the inquisitiveness of adolescence; she appears immersed in the reality of a marital struggle. For this woman marriage exemplifies a silent struggle for supremacy, a conflict which epitomizes mutual contempt and the desire to inflict pain because they have "reached the point in [their] marriage where no advantage was given up easily" (Moons 11).

Although this story focusses on the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity of the present, the narrator's perception of past happiness appears to reinforce the unhappiness of her present situation. Unable to distinguish between illusion and reality, or to establish the truth of an event which has become more ambiguous with time, the narrator tries to perceive the childhood "gaiety and generosity, the worldliness" of her aunt's visit to Dalgleish (small town Ontario) from the perspective of an unhappy and affluent life in Vancouver. Believing that she has not really changed over time and that her Aunt Iris is "decently educated, well enough spoken, moderately well-bred" (Moons 11), the narrator thinks that her present feeling of discontentment and Richard's contempt for her background have altered the

perception of a moment previously frozen in time. "It would be better to think," she says, "that time had soured and thinned and made commonplace a brew that used to sparkle, that difficulties had altered us both, and not for the better" (Moons 17).

Illuminating the present reality of the marital struggle, Iris's visit also operates as a moment of exposure for the narrator. Indeed, this woman must accept a disconcerting revelation; like Richard's, her perceptions have also changed over time. She may be angered by her husband's thoughtlessness and by his obvious contempt for Dalgleish, but the narrator must face an unpleasant truth about her own perceptions. Realizing that Iris does represent the antithesis of her present life in Vancouver, the narrator struggles against the reality that she has become an extension of Richard's consciousness; she is horrified that contemptuous Richard may be right about the sordidness of her past.

While the narrator feels caught between her feeling of bitterness toward Richard's scornful behavior and the realization that she, too, is embarrassed by the vulgarity of Iris, the reader knows that Iris symbolizes the same unrefined or provincial interpretation of elegance as the "plastic swan, lime green in color, with slits in the wings, in which were stuck folded, colored paper napkins" in

Who Do You Think You Are? (88). Like the swan centrepiece, Aunt Iris's "hair . . . now gilt and sprayed into a foamy pile, her sumptuous peacock-blue dress" (Moons 14) depicts an aspect of the narrator's past that Richard desperately wants to forget because "[p]overty, to Richard's family, was like bad breath or running sores, an affliction for which the afflicted must bear one part of the blame" (Moons 12).

The gaudy 'reality' of Iris, both in appearance and in her conversation, exhibits the banality of Dalgleish; she represents a threat and illustrates that the narrator has not been successfully "amputated from the past . . ." (Moons 13). Like the plastic swan, Aunt Iris poses a threat to Richard's concept of propriety, but, for the reader, Iris's appearance and her conversation expose a more disturbing issue than Richard's snobbery. Indeed, while her appearance incites Richard's contempt, it also reveals the silent hostility and the perpetual struggle that exists in this marriage. Her comical vulgarity exposes the painful reality of this relationship:

> Iris's lipstick, her bright teased hair, her iridescent dress and oversized brooch, her voice and conversation, were all part of a policy which was not a bad one: she was in favor of movement, noise, change, flashiness, hilarity and courage. Fun. She thought other people should be in favor of these

> things too, and told about her efforts on the tour. (Moons 16)

Distressed by Richard's evident contempt for Iris and forced to conceal her own sense of uneasiness, the narrator appreciates that time has altered her perceptions of reality. And as the narrator listens to her aunt's anecdotes she is aware that she agrees with Richard; she too perceives Iris's vulgarity. As the truth becomes clear, the realization that "[n]othing deflected [Iris] from her stories of herself; the amount of time she could spend not talking was limited" (Moons 16), the narrator wonders how time and her relationship with Richard have altered her happy memories of the aunts' visit to Dalgleish. She wonders about Iris: "But had she always been like this, always brash and greedy and scared; . . . somebody you hope you will not have to sit too long beside, on a bus or at a party?" (Moons 16).

While the narrator must face the disturbing knowledge that she was dishonest when she "implied that Richard's judgments were all that stood in the way" of an appreciation of Iris, she must also confront her own unwillingness to confirm any of Richard's opinions (Moons 16). Caught in a perpetual struggle for supremacy, this marriage is based on a need to humiliate one another at every

opportunity. Ironically, in this relationship a "need for reassurance" (Moons 11) is interpreted as a sign of weakness, and as the narrator confesses: "we had reached the point in our marriage where no advantage was given up easily" (Moons 11).

Since they have reached this deplorable state in their marriage it is apparent that Iris's visit sheds an ironic light on the Chaddeleys and Flemings' imagined connections with the English nobility. A belief in "Connection. That was what it was all about" has a satirical connotation when we consider Richard's emphasis on the importance of family connections, because Iris represents a connection with his wife that he would like to eradicate (Moons 6). And since Richard's whole existence seems to be defined by his "connections," after meeting Iris and connecting her to the sordidness of Dalgleish, Richard announces that "he [has] to move the sprinkler" (Moons 15), but his urge to remain "lurking in the kitchen" seems to symbolize very different motivations (Moons 15). Ironically, his need to listen to the conversation exemplifies the pain of human contact and illustrates that this relationship thrives on conflict, on the overwhelming need to belittle one another.

Aunt Iris's visit has conveniently provided another opportunity to instigate a struggle for power, a moment

of exposure in which humiliation and violence vividly convey their true feelings for one another. Just before the narrator throws the pie plate, which represents "so shocking a verdict in real life" (Moons 18), Richard can barely restrain himself until Iris leaves before he begins a verbal attack:

> What a pathetic old tart, said Richard coming into the living room as I was gathering up the coffee cups. He followed me into the kitchen, recalling things she had said, pretentious things, bits of bragging. He pointed out grammatical mistakes she had made, of the would-be genteel variety. He pretended incredulity. Maybe he felt it. Or maybe he thought it would be a good idea to start the attack immediately before I took him to task for leaving the room, being rude, not offering a ride to the hotel.
>
> He was still talking as I threw the Pyrex plate at his head. (Moons 18)

The sudden violence that interrupts Richard's verbal abuse reminds us of Herb's "peculiar, stricken look" in "The Turkey Season", because the reader is left to contemplate the anguish that has provoked this incident. When we reflect on the ambiguity here, the blending of illusion and reality, the conclusion to this story seems appropriate. After considering the unhappiness of the present, the narrator may wish to return to the illusion of "the gaiety and generosity, the worldliness" of the

past (Moons 17). Only in the past could she believe "Life is but a dream" (Moons 18).

In contrast to the young woman's perception that human relationships embody an incessant struggle, Munro's depiction of the middle-aged woman in The Moons of Jupiter typifies an even more cynical view of the mutability of human relationships. Compelled to accept the precarious quality of happiness, the middle-aged woman suffers from the certainty that there is a vast difference between illusion and reality; now there is a "gap between what she wanted [from a relationship] and what she could get" ("Dulse", Moons 53). Like Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are? who acknowledges the transitory quality of sexual relationships, the mature woman in The Moons of Jupiter desperately anticipates the painful conclusion to an intimate relationship almost as soon as it begins. She comprehends the reality that at her age she has "stopped being one sort of woman and [has] become another" ("Dulse", Moons 36), and that men prefer the other, young type of woman in a long-term relationship.

The fatalistic approach to the relationships depicted in The Moons of Jupiter is vividly conveyed in "Bardon Bus." In this story, the "moments of exposure" are subtly portrayed; these decisive moments are revealed through a movement in narrative time, a shift that

examines the character's imaginative response and her response to reality. In fact, the character's imagination and her private perception of the past embody despair, a sense of loss that cannot be admitted in real life. Confessional in tone, the fantasy sections of "Bardon Bus" convey a disturbing truth about the central character; her flights of fantasy suggest a feeling of despair that is repressed in the sections depicting daily life. For this woman real-life encounters demand impassivity and an acceptance that her Australian affair has ended, but the reader is aware of a disconcerting truth: the stoical demeanour exhibited in real life is actually an illusion and the reader is forced to imagine the suffering taking place behind this middle-aged facade of indifference.

Unlike the final moment of exposure in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: Connection" when the woman violently expresses her feeling of humiliation, in "Bardon Bus" the narrator's despair is communicated silently; it is internalized. Incapable of coping with the fact that her affair, with a man she refers to as X, has ended, she contemplates how past generations contended with the fleeting quality of happiness, and, as she imagines a more romantic past, the narrator's depiction of lost love reminds us of the delicate moment of exposure in "Prue". Similarly, this silent moment makes us wonder about the depth of her

anguish; like Prue's articles in the old tobacco tin, this woman's fantasy and her memory are all she has left of the relationship. Like Prue and the "madly secretive, tenacious, economical" women from past generations, she too "could make a little go a long way" ("Bardon Bus", Moons 110).

An imaginative depiction of the past, a portrayal that embodies her own silent awareness of loss, sets the tone for the entire story. And as the narrator considers how much easier it was "being an old maid, in another generation" this woman is revealing a sense of hopelessness and a fear of loneliness, emotions that she will never admit to in real life. Indeed, she can only conjure up a romantic image to appease her feeling of despair:

> A piece of Chinese silk folded in a drawer, worn by the touch of fingers in the dark. Or the one letter, hidden under maidenly garments, never needing to be opened or read because every word is known by heart, and a touch communicates the whole. Perhaps nothing so tangible, nothing but the memory of an ambiguous word, an intimate, casual tone of voice, a hard, helpless look. (Moons 110)

Although the narrator would prefer to "fasten on [to] . . . A lifelong secret, lifelong dream-life" (Moons 110), the next section of "Bardon Bus" illustrates that everyday life is the antithesis of her private world of

illusion, or as she admits: "This summer I'm living in Toronto, in my friend Kay's apartment, finishing a book of family history which some rich people are paying me to write" (Moons 111). In addition, in real life, her fanciful view of lost love conflicts with the simple truth of a very brief affair she conducted with an anthropologist when they were both working in Australia.

Aware that the relationship with the anthropologist was a temporary arrangement, the narrator accepted the conditions intellectually, the "holiday . . . lightness of spirit without the holiday feeling of being at loose ends" (Moons 113); but, emotionally, she did not accept the affair as a brief interlude. For example, she chooses to call this man X because "[t]he letter X seems . . . expansive and secretive" (Moons 112). Ironically, her inability to use his actual name represents a painful admission; it is a suitable title for a man who went out of her life as quickly as he came into it and, indeed, it is a suitable label for such a fleeting glimpse of happiness.

When the narrator must face the reality of the transitory quality of intimate relationships, she confesses: "We lived without responsibility, without a future, in freedom, with generosity, in constant but not wearying celebration. We had no doubt that our happiness would

last out the little time required" (Moons 113). But her private motivations and her imagination reveal an entirely different perspective; her apparent acceptance of reality typifies an illusion, a perversion of her true feelings. She is only able to admit to herself: "I dreamed that X wrote me a letter . . . . He said he wanted us to go on a trip to Cuba. . . . He said he did not want to interfere with my life but he did want to shelter me. I loved that word" (Moons 114).

While we acknowledge the disparity between illusion and reality, the sense of anguish revealed in the interior monologues heightens our perception of the despair this woman conceals during her daily encounters. Indeed, her friend Kay's emotional flux during the course of love affairs exhibits the same cycle of emotions that the narrator conceals. Acting as a mirror-image, Kay reflects what the narrator is really experiencing, "the onset of gloom, the doubts and anguish, the struggle either to free herself or to keep him from freeing himself" (Moons 116). Like Kay, "she survives without visible damage," but she disguises her true sense of loss under a carefully-prepared facade of being "brisk and entertaining, straightforward, analytical" (Moons 116).

This illusion of control suffers its greatest test when the narrator comes in contact with X's younger friend,

Dennis, because the conversation with Dennis forces us to imagine the anguish concealed beneath her appearance of indifference. And we can almost visualize what is hidden by a woman who is anything but in control of her real feelings. For example, during her relationship with X, Dennis comes to visit and his comment about X's women is not only malicious but it acts as a moment of exposure for the narrator. While the anthropological site Dennis is working on reminds him of X's women, "[r]ow on row and always a new one appearing at the end of the line" (Moons 119), this woman must struggle to maintain an impassive demeanour. Striving to disguise her true feelings, to maintain the illusion of control, she responds as if she is prepared for the inevitable conclusion to the relationship. In her reply to Dennis's assessment of X, she attempts to illustrate her modern view of love affairs:

> But it's not that way with women, I said to Dennis. I spoke with a special, social charm, almost flirtatiously, as I often do when I detect malice. I think the comparison's a bit off. Nobody has to dig the women out and stand them on their feet. Nobody put them there. They came along and joined up of their own free will and some day they'll leave. They're not a standing army. Most of them are probably on their way to someplace else anyway. (Moons 120)

While we know that this speech exemplifies an

ironic distortion of reality (the narrator has silently admitted that she is definitely "not on [her] way to some-place else"), the second encounter with Dennis, at dinner in Toronto, reinforces the painful reality that lies beneath this woman's "special, social charm", a reality hidden beneath an appearance of self-possession. And although she may respond "cheerfully, not insistently" to Dennis's probing questions, she is tormented by the idea that he has perceived the truth beneath her calm exterior (Moons 121). He seems to know intuitively that she accepts his premise that "men have this way of renewing themselves, they get this refill of vitality, while the women are you might say removed from life. . . . forced to live in the world of loss and death!" (Moons 122). In fact, Dennis's "malicious, sympathetic way" (Moons 121) of discussing the plight of older women and the narrator's silent admission, "I can't think of anything to say" (Moons 122) illustrate her despair as vividly as "I think of being an old maid, in another generation" (Moons 110). Silently agreeing with Dennis about the impossibility of the middle-aged woman achieving a permanent relationship, she also seems to accept his ludicrous remark, "It's only by natural renunciation and by accepting deprivation, that we prepare for death and therefore that we get any

happiness" (Moons 122).

The problem of having to accept the "deprivation" that Dennis insists is real and inevitable is articulated in the subtle irony of the conclusion to "Bardon Bus". There, the narrator resists Dennis's prescription of renunciation and acceptance by purchasing some new provocative clothing in the hope of "devastating [X] with [her] altered looks and late-blooming splendor" (Moons 125). Ironically, at the end of "Bardon Bus", the narrator's friend, Kay, appears in a new outfit, "a dark-green schoolgirl's tunic worn without a blouse or brassiere" (Moons 128). Throughout "Bardon Bus" the narrator has viewed Kay with ironic detachment because of her predictable excessiveness vis-à-vis men and relationships: Kay, we are told, "does what women do . . . . [but] more often, more openly, just a bit more ill-advisedly, and more fervently" (Moons 116). In her new schoolgirl's tunic, Kay appears to be a slightly exaggerated reflection of the narrator; she may not look as "classy and . . . provocative" (Moons 124) as the middle-aged narrator does in her new clothes, but Kay's attempt at a youthful appearance aligns her with the narrator in her resistance of "deprivation", and indicates that she is on the verge of a new relationship with a man who is, coincidentally, an anthropologist whose name does contain the letter X.

The ironic conclusion to "Bardon Bus" urges the reader to imagine the consequences or the emotional impact of this final moment of awareness. No longer able to disregard the disparity between her romantic illusion and the reality of deprivation, this middle-aged woman must now acknowledge that her fleeting glimpse of happiness has come to resemble Kay's definition of sexual relationships. The narrator's desperate attempt to establish an enduring relationship has become a mental exercise in "[o]bsession and self-delusion" (Moons 117).

While the final moment of exposure in "Bardon Bus" achieves an ironic intensity because of this woman's perception of "the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity" is conveyed through a juxtaposition of illusion and reality, in "Labor Day Dinner" the middle-aged woman must face a different type of deprivation; her relationship with a younger man is on the verge of collapse. Imbued with the images of the body and the natural process of decay, where even the title of the story denotes the final celebration before the onset of autumn, "Labor Day Dinner" portrays the deterioration of the intimacy between Roberta and George.

Feeling "pinned down by a murderous silence" (Moons 137), Roberta's perception of the pain of human contact epitomizes the unhappiness that she and George

seem to inflict on one another, but it also typifies the detrimental effects that this relationship has had on her. Seeing "herself curling up like a jaundiced leaf" (Moons 136), Roberta seems to have moved beyond the struggle inherent in the marital relationship of "Connection," and even beyond the illusory world of "Bardon Bus," to a loss of identity. For example, as Roberta gets dressed for the party and George asks, "'Is that what you're wearing?. . . . Your armpits are flabby'" (Moons 137), the insensitivity of his remarks illuminates the sense of decay and lack of compassion within the relationship. The "slackness and sallowness and subtle withering" (Moons 154) of Roberta's body is indicative of more than the aging process; "the subtle withering" also appears symbolic of a slow erosion of identity, the passivity and lingering self-pity of "an intelligent woman who used to believe in freedom" (Moons 147).

Roberta's decision to relinquish her freedom, to live on the farm with George where "everything must be done in order, and George has figured out the order" (Moons 144), vividly portrays how she has successfully tried to become what she believes George wants her to be. Indeed, Roberta's desperate attempt to curtail the aging process, appears as hopeless a task as maintaining her identity in this relationship. No longer able to

control her feeling of self-pity, Roberta's view of her physical presence ironically seems to coincide with her sense of emotional deterioration:

> She's always the one; disasters overtake her daily. It used to be that as soon as she noticed some deterioration she would seek strenuously to remedy it. Now the remedies bring more problems. She applies cream frantically to her wrinkles, and her face breaks out in spots, like a teen-ager's. Dieting until her waist was thin enough to please produced a haggard look about her cheeks and throat.
> (Moons 137)

Roberta may decide that "[s]he must get away, live alone, wear sleeves" (Moons 137), but "now that life has got this new kind of grip on her" (Moons 141) she seems demoralized and immersed in self-pity, incapable of terminating a relationship that has drawn "the sap right out of her body" (Moons 145). Trapped by an inability to control her own life Roberta perceives that her relationship with George is slowly "withering away" and like the other mature women in The Moons of Jupiter she is depressingly aware of an absence of power, of a "gap between what she wanted and what she could get" ("Dulse", Moons 53). Roberta and the other women in The Moons of Jupiter are inclined to "talk as if there's no solution" ("Labor Day Dinner", Moons 157) to the dichotomy between

what they had hoped for from a relationship and what they had actually experienced, but the women in Munro's most recent fiction, The Progress of Love, move beyond the painful reality of the moment, beyond a concern with the transitory quality of intimate relationships to the point, as one of Munro's characters expresses it, "[s]he felt the old cavity opening up in her. But she held on" ("Lichen", Progress 55). She survives the momentary sense of despair.

III

The Progress of Love

In certain respects Alice Munro's most recent work, The Progress of Love, bears a striking resemblance to her previous collection of short stories, The Moons of Jupiter. Like The Moons of Jupiter, her latest volume of stories embodies familiar structural elements; the narrative shifts from the present to the past as Munro, once again, seems to search for the moments of significance that define or shape a woman's life. In both works she illustrates how the past and the present are delicately intertwined and "[s]he implies that the way we change a memory tells us something about ourselves, and our feelings for other people" (Levine 14). During the moment of exposure, "the skin of the moment can break open" ("White Dump", Progress 308) to disclose how the past has fused in order to determine the shape of one's future.

Although there is an obvious similarity in structure (a resemblance which may convince the reader of a lack of progression in Munro's art) her perception of how a woman responds to the pain of human contact and the language conveying this response, receives a new emphasis in The

Progress of Love. In stories such as "Jesse and Meribeth", "White Dump" and "Circle of Prayer", Munro epitomizes "the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity" inherent in human relationships; however, she moves beyond this point, allowing her female characters to attain levels of self-knowledge and expression that are not apparent in her previous works.

Unlike the women in "Bardon Bus" and "Labor Day Dinner" from The Moons of Jupiter who appear trapped by a sense of irreparable loss, the female characters in The Progress of Love (as the title implies) survive the confusion of illusion and reality; they transcend the painful realization of the moment and develop a deeper understanding of human relationships and of themselves. In fact, both the adolescent perception and the response of the more mature woman seem to coincide with the message conveyed by the final line in "White Dump" when Isabel translates the Old Norse passage. While the line "It is too late to talk of this now: it has been decided" seems to have a pessimistic connotation or a sense of finality, Isabel's infidelity has set in motion a predetermined course of events. Having made the decision to dissolve the relationship with her husband, Laurence, the resolution to escape a painful reality makes her feel "rescued, lifted, beheld, and safe" (Progress 309).

As Isabel finally decides that she has no regrets, the woman in "Circle of Prayer" must contend with the reality that her marriage is over; she too moves beyond the anguish of the moment to a sense of acceptance and to a final acknowledgement of "it has been decided." In "Circle of Prayer", which begins in the present and then moves into the past, Trudy reflects upon her relationship with Dan and the crucial events leading to their divorce. Recalling the violent conflict and the sense of rejection she experienced when Dan fell in love with a younger woman, Trudy contemplates the final struggle, the cruel irony of Dan's words as he attempts to appease his own sense of guilt. As he leaves Trudy for another woman, Dan rationalizes: "This will open life up for you, too . . . You can be more than just a wife" (Progress 264). On the other hand, when he feels capable of responding more honestly, Dan admits to Trudy: "He loved her mind and her soul. He always would. But the part of his life that had been bound up with hers was over" (Progress 264).

Although Trudy's initial reaction to Dan's decision to leave is a hostile one (she began "yelling and screaming. She clawed through a cushion cover" [Progress 265]), surprisingly this story does not end with the mature woman's sense of disillusionment, the pervading sense of futility conveyed in Who Do You Think You Are?

and The Moons of Jupiter. Indeed, Trudy seems to perceive something intangible that lies beyond the hostility of the moment and beyond her sense of loss. She accepts that her marriage is over and during the final moment before Dan leaves Trudy experiences a feeling of serenity, a moment where even the language exemplifies acceptance:

> All Trudy's movements seemed skillful and perfect, as they never were, usually. She felt serene. She felt as if they were an old couple, moving in harmony, in wordless love, past injury, past forgiving. Their goodbye was hardly a ripple. She went outside with him. It was between four-thirty and five o'clock; the sky was beginning to lighten and the birds to wake, everything was drenched in dew.
> (Progress 267)

Similarly, when Trudy compares this event, the moment when Dan leaves her, to an instance of awareness that occurred during her honeymoon with him, she has the sense of existing beyond the confines of time. Realizing that there are "Breathing spaces" or "clear patches" (Progress 273) in one's life when it is possible to transcend the painful reality of the present, Trudy compares the end of her marriage to a time at the beginning of the relationship when she listened to her mother-in-law play the piano. Although one moment appears to be the antithesis of the other, past and present seem to merge, allowing her to stand outside her sense of distress and

loneliness:

> The clattering, faltering, persistent piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which ached then from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own happiness in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you get outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life -- what do they have to do with it? They aren't exactly promises. Breathing spaces. Is that all? (Progress 273)

While this delicate moment of exposure seems to symbolize Trudy's ability to move beyond her feeling of loss, the adolescent in The Progress of Love also exhibits a knowledge and an acceptance of self that was not apparent in the adolescent perceptions of Who Do You Think You Are? and "The Turkey Season" in The Moons of Jupiter. Unlike Rose in Who Do You Think You Are? whose sexual inhibitions "made her feel uncomfortable, resentful, slightly disgusted, trapped and wary" (63) and the young narrator in "The Turkey Season" who "couldn't quite believe that 'come near' meant 'have sex'" (Moons 68), Jessie, the central character in "Jesse and Meribeth," appears more worldly, more capable of dealing with the inconsistencies and the sexuality of the adult world.

Contemplating her physical presence in comparison to that of her more attractive friend MaryBeth, Jessie may admit: "I felt that I was a crude piece of work altogether, with my strong legs and hefty bosom -- robust and sweaty and ill-clad" (Progress 165) but she is secure in the knowledge of an innate superiority. She is "at the same time, deeply, naturally, unspeakably, unthinkably . . . . superior" (Progress 165). Convinced of her superiority, and imbued with a sense of future promise, Jessie confronts her own sexuality and, ironically, her first encounter with the adult world of sexuality creates a vivid contrast to Rose's inhibited and guilt-ridden response to the minister's hand in the episode "Wild Swans" in Who Do You Think You Are? Indeed, although Jessie's romantic illusions about Mr. Cryderman's declarations of love represent the antithesis of the passionate reality of his touch, she passively accepts his advances, and when he first touches her, moving his fingers along her throat "finally stroking [her] skin as if they would leave furrows" (Progress 182), she remains motionless, giving herself up to the almost painful realization of an awakening sexuality.

While Jessie's "throat tingles as if it had taken a blow" (Progress 182), the second encounter with Mr. Cryderman, when he accuses Jessie of encouraging

his advances, typifies the same type of inconsistency that the adolescent narrator in "The Turkey Season" perceived in the adult world of the Turkey Barn. But, unlike the adolescent in "The Turkey Season", who was bewildered by Lily and Marjorie's admiration for a father who had caused them so much unhappiness, Jessie is fully aware of the ambiguities inherent in adult life; she is ultimately aware of Mr. Cryderman's malicious intent and his desire to alleviate his own sense of guilt. She is not curious about the absurdities intrinsic in adult life, and the dichotomy between Mr. Cryderman's words and his actions reinforces her belief that she never "expected anything but the most artificial, painful, formal contact with the world of adults" (Progress 168):

> He is telling me I'm not to blame,
> while his fingers start up these
> flutters under my skin, rousing
> a tender, distant ache. . . .
> His hand rouses and his words
> shame, and something in his voice
> mocks endlessly, at both these
> responses. . . . But I am not
> ashamed of what he's telling me
> I should be ashamed of. I'm
> ashamed of being caught out, made
> foolish, of being so enticed and
> scolded. (Progress 184)

Ironically, Jessie is prepared for a passionate attack: she admits, "All I want to be is equal to this" (Progress 183), but when Mr. Cryderman reveals more about Jessie than an interest in her physical attributes she is disconcerted by the fact that he can perceive her secret

thoughts. And in revealing the truth about Jessie his words add an ironic meaning to the narrator's pronouncement in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field" in The Moons of Jupiter, when she says: "Now I no longer believe that people's secrets are defined and communicable, or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize" (35). In this case, Mr. Cryderman proves that Jessie's "secrets are defined and communicable" and he eagerly anticipates her discomfort and embarrassment as he warns: "One thing you will have to learn, Jessie. To consider other people. The reality of other people. It sounds simple but it can be difficult. For you it will be difficult" (Progress 184).

If Mr. Cryderman expects a sentimental reaction from Jessie, typified by weeping and an outpouring of guilt, that is definitely not the reaction his words create. In fact, Jessie does seem superior to anything he can say and her momentary sense of discomfort is quickly obscured by the feeling of superiority to which he has alluded. Jessie may understand that he is right; people have become "puppets . . . serving the glossy contrivings of [her] imagination" (Progress 184), but this does not prevent Jessie from disguising this painful reality, and she admits:

> Pride hardens, instead, over the
> nakedly perceived fault. . . .
> Pride hardens, pride deals with

> all those craven licks of sweetness, douses the hope of pleasure, the deep-seated glow of invitation. What do I want with anybody who can know so much about me? In fact, if I could wipe him from the face of the earth now, I would.
> (Progress 184)

While the adolescent reaction in "Jesse and Meribeth" represents a departure from the more sentimentalized depiction of adolescence in her earlier works, Munro concentrates upon another aspect of the pain of human contact in The Progress of Love, a characteristic of human relationships that we have not seen in her previous fictions. In "Fits", Munro uses the metaphor of progress to envisage an extreme situation in an intimate relationship. Depicting the perfectly-coordinated surface of her female character, she imbues this story with an element of ambiguity, a confusion of illusion and reality that warns the reader that there is a serious problem concealed just below the surface of things. Indeed, we wonder if Peg, the central character in "Fits" has experienced such intense pain in an earlier marriage that she has moved beyond the ability to exhibit an emotional response, because ironically, Peg's "self-contained" (Progress 109) appearance seems to mirror the description of the winter landscape in this story. Just as the snow conceals the actual contours of the

land, creating "its own landscape, which was sweeping in a grand and arbitrary style" (Progress 127), we wonder what lies beneath the self-controlled facade exhibited by Peg.

In this bizarre story of a murder-suicide (not Munro's usual approach to human relationships) when Peg finds the remains of the Weebles in an upstairs bedroom of their house, calmly reports the tragedy to the police -- taking time to exchange pleasantries with the local constable -- and then reports for work wearing a blood-smeared coat, we begin to wonder about this woman's emotional fortitude and about her "patterned, limited, serious and desirable life" (Progress 111). Initially, we may admire her resolve and believe that she transcends the need to scream or to appear "absolutely shattered" (Progress 120) in front of the curious customers at the store. But upon further consideration, her response to Karen, her friend and co-worker, is both perplexing and disturbing when we consider the horrific scene she has just witnessed. In reply to Karen's,""How come you never said a word about this," Peg says "'I'm sorry, . . . I'm sorry.' Just like she's apologizing for some little thing like using [Karen's] coffee mug. Only, Peg would never do that" (Progress 116). Indeed, Peg's self-controlled "'I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry" and

her "self-contained" (Progress 109) demeanour represent an enigma; the absence of an emotional response conveys a painful reality. There is something drastically wrong with Peg Kruiper.

The most disturbing aspect of her rigidly controlled response is revealed when Robert, Peg's husband, attempts to explain murder-suicide as being "like an earthquake or a volcano. . . . It's a kind of fit" (Progress 126). And the eruption of violent emotions that Robert attempts to define seems to coincide with the mysterious element in Peg's first marriage because Robert can discuss his previous relationship with Lee, a relationship that "split open" (Progress 127) until "they exulted in wounds inflicted but also in wounds received" (Progress 128), but Peg can only counter Robert's confession with factual information about her marriage to Dave. Surprisingly, these facts are a chilling reminder that the facade Peg presents is a mirror-image of the surface details recounted about the Weebles:

> On Boxing Day, when they dropped over to have a drink with Peg and Robert, she wore a pale-gray dress with a fine, shiny stripe in it, gray stockings, and gray shoes. She drank gin-and-tonic. He wore brown slacks and a cream-coloured sweater, and drank rye-and-water. (Progress 106)

Peg, on the other hand, "is a small slim woman. . . . She wears pleated skirts, fresh neat blouses buttoned to the throat, pale sweaters, sometimes a black ribbon tie" (Progress 109).

Munro concentrates on the appearance of both Peg and the Weebles as if to stress their banal, innocuous physical presence, as if to stress that their clothes are a comment on, or a visualization of, their dispositions. Peg's clean and almost repressed appearance seems a manifestation of an instinct to keep things civilized and nicely superficial. Indeed, when we compare her recollections about her relationship with Dave to those verbalized by Robert about his own relationship with another woman, it becomes clear that Peg would prefer always to avoid touching upon any note of the irrational, the emotional, the passionate. While Robert admits that during an emotionally explosive encounter with Lee, "[t]hey laughed in recognition of their extremity. . . . They trembled with murderous pleasure, with the excitement of saying what could never be retracted" (Progress 128), Peg passively recalls insignificant, factual details:

> We lived with Dave's parents.
> There was never enough hot
> water for the baby's wash.
> Finally we got out and came to
> town and we lived beside the
> car wash. Dave was only with us

> weekends then. It was very noisy, especially at night. Then Dave got another job, he went up North, and I rented this place. (Progress 129)

Peg's tendency to avoid discussing her feelings about her first marriage makes us wonder if she came close to experiencing the kind of intolerable and destructive emotions that the Weebles endured. In fact, Robert's reference to the violent emotions of "wrenching and slashing" (Progress 129) may come close to the carefully repressed truth about Peg's previous marriage, an experience that has destroyed her ability to acknowledge the pain of human contact. Like Robert we question if she is employing "[e]rrors of avoidance, [or] errors of passion" (Progress 129) because no marriage ends the way she describes it. And as Robert so astutely observes:

> A man doesn't just drive farther and farther away in his trucks until he disappears from his wife's view. . . . Things happen before he goes. Marriage knots aren't going to slip apart painlessly, with the pull of distance. There's got to be some wrenching and slashing. But she didn't say, and he didn't ask, or even think about that, till now. (Progress 129)

Now Robert does consider Peg's previous relationship; he wonders if her illusion of self-control and her "quick transactional smile, [conveying] nothing personal"

(Progress 109) disguise the intolerable reality of an emotional "wrenching and slashing." And ironically, while Peg continues to give the impression of being "an emotional spendthrift" (Progress 128), he notices that her one moment of exposure occurs when Clayton refers to her former relationship with Dave. When Peg's son, Clayton, says, "'I used to think one of you was going to come and kill me with a knife'" (Progress 126), Robert observes Peg's expression of pain:

> . . .Peg was looking at Clayton. She who always seemed pale and silky and assenting, but hard to follow as a watermark in fine paper, looked dried out, chalky, her outlines fixed in steady, helpless, unapologetic pain.
> (Progress 126)

Just as a "watermark in fine paper" is difficult to follow, Peg has constructed an image that is difficult to define, but unlike the narrator in "Bardon Bus" in The Moons of Jupiter, whose romantic perception of the past reveals her true feelings, we cannot penetrate Peg's self-contained veneer. Cut off from the painful reality of Peg's past, we discover that the truth continues to elude us even at the conclusion of the story, just as the reasons for the Weebles' murder-suicide will never be completely understood by the people of the town of Gilmore.

Peg remains concealed beneath the factual details of her existence, disguised like the snow-covered landscape that Robert walks on. Like the snowy landscape, Peg's image conceals a deplorable emotional state but outwardly she responds to life without really suffering a "whisper or a crack" (Progress 127) in her surface appearance. However, as Robert observes about the snow that arbitrarily conceals the shape of the ground underneath, Peg's inner reality may have little to do with the image that is presented to the world:

> He [Robert] walked here and there, testing. The crust took his weight without a whisper or a crack. . . . You could walk over the snowy fields as if you were walking on cement. (This morning, looking at the snow, hadn't he thought of marble?) But this paving was not flat. It rose and dipped in a way that had not much to do with the contours of the ground underneath. (Progress 127)

Just as Peg has constructed an image, a persona that induces Robert to assert about their relationship, "it wouldn't be all right; it would never be all right" (Progress 130), Munro's final story in The Progress of Love also depicts a woman whose external reality (the surface displayed to the world) does not conform to her

private motivations. Unlike the story "Fits" where Munro focusses on the present, thus preventing the reader from ascertaining the truth about Peg's previous relationship, in "White Dump" she shifts the narrative from the present back into the past and allows the reader to comprehend the nature of the disparity between the illusion Isabel attempts to create and how she really feels about her relationship with her husband, Laurence.

Isabel's silent awareness of her unhappiness and her struggle to maintain an appearance of "attention, enthusiasm [and] watchfulness" (Progress 303) in her marriage to Laurence reminds us of Lydia's precarious relationship with Duncan in the story "Dulse" in The Moons of Jupiter. Like Lydia, Isabel also sees "herself as a dancer on her toes, trembling delicately all over, afraid of letting him [Laurence] down on the next turn" ("Dulse", Moons 54). Similarly, while Lydia confirms, "'No. No. I'm never happy. What I am is relieved, it's as if I'd overcome a challenge, it's more triumphant than happy!'" (Moons 55), Isabel "seldom concerned herself about Laurence's being happy. She wanted him to be in a good mood, so that everything would go smoothly, but that was not the same thing" (Progress 304). But while Lydia believes that Duncan "can always pull the

rug out" (Moons 55) from under her, and, indeed, she appears to be at an emotional impasse, incapable of achieving any control over her own destiny, "White Dump" conveys a more positive view of the mature woman. In this story we discover a woman who finally faces the decisive moment of separation, one who is able to abandon an unsatisfying relationship. Isabel finally admits to herself that "[s]he was kindled for it" (Progress 305), ready to grasp the opportunity to escape a marriage based on pretension and the superficiality of appearance.

In contrast to the women in The Moons of Jupiter who seem to lament the uncertainty and the transitory quality of intimate relationships, women who cope with disillusionment and outwardly accept a "subtle withering" ("Labor Day Dinner", Moons 154) of relationships, Isabel decides that being able to create an illusion of happiness is not enough. For her, marriage epitomizes a perpetual series of tasks, a series of "hurdles got through" (Progress 303) and she is finally forced to confess:

> Not much to her credit to go through her life thinking, Well, good, now that's over, that's over. What was she looking forward to, what bonus was she hoping to get, when this, and this, and this was over? (Progress 303)

Existing in a constant state of anxiety, knowing

that "by reassurance and good management; [Laurence] depended on her to make him a man" (Progress 304), Isabel is no longer willing to cope with the vast disparity between her outward display of happiness and the painful reality that she wanted "Freedom -- or not even freedom. Emptiness, a lapse of attention" (Progress 303). And although her decision to be unfaithful to Laurence "hit her like lightning, split her like lightning" (Progress 305), Isabel knows that the affair really becomes symbolic of a means of escape, of an attempt at emotional survival. Her decision makes her "feel rescued, beheld and safe" (Progress 309) because like the other women in The Progress of Love she has moved beyond "the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity"; she has achieved a level of self-knowledge. Human relationships may never actually represent "progress", but Isabel, like the other women in The Progress of Love can admit that she "has no regrets" (Progress 308).

Conclusion

In her exploration of the pain of human contact, a study of the "agonized awareness of the perils of moving through the transitions of life, from childhood, to adolescence, from adulthood to age" (Woodcock 239), Alice Munro sets forth an honest "expression of feeling and attitude which we need to give voice to" (Gold 2), but in acknowledging the painful reality inherent in human relationships we must also recognize Munro's essential compassion for the way her characters influence one another's lives. While we accept their inevitable disillusionment and the tentative resolutions they arrive at in their relationships with others, Munro also poignantly conveys particular moments of awareness when her female characters seem to stand outside "the fascinating pain, the humiliating necessity." Thus, when Roberta in "Labor Day Dinner" in The Moons of Jupiter appears immersed in self-pity, a self-pity that is constantly "rising and sloshing around in her bitter bile" (137), we can also identify with Munro's essential compassion for this character and we are able to be amused by the absurdity of Roberta's decision to "get away, live alone,

wear sleeves." Similarly, in "Circle of Prayer" from The Progress of Love, Munro captures a silent moment of awareness, a moment of exposure that "radiates", an instance of affirmation as one life symbolically touches another. Indeed, as Trudy shares a joke with Kevin, past and present seem to merge; her sense of despair is overshadowed by a silent moment of awareness. "[W]hen she was young, and high," Trudy recalls, "a person or a moment could become a lily floating on the cloudy river water, perfect and familiar" (274).

Moments like these prevent Munro's vision from becoming morose, and as one critic remarks, Munro's delicate moments of exposure, her ability to bring her characters to a silent moment of awareness coincides with the pauses between musical notes: "Someone has said that the most beautiful parts of music are the silences between the notes. Something like that is true of Alice Munro's short stories" (Martin 34).

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